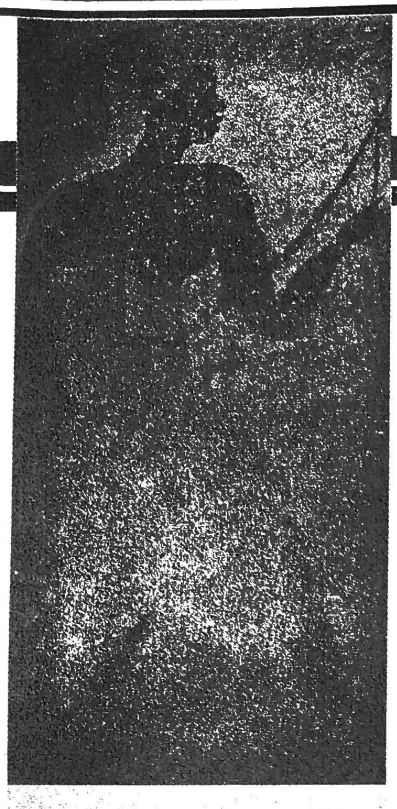


LESSON 1

50,000 B.C. | 40,000 B.C. | 10,000 B.C.

# EARLY PEOPLE

## Focus Activity

**READ TO LEARN**
What did early people do to survive?

**VOCABULARY**
technology
Old Stone Age
hunter-gatherer

**PLACES**
Border Cave

### READ ALOUD

*"I was born and grew up in East Africa where, while I was still very young, my imagination was caught by the great age of the world I found myself in. . . . I would visualize the [procession] of lives that had [come before] me there. I would think of those other eyes that had opened on the first flush of sunlight on the hilltops for more than 2 million years, noses that whiffed the smoke of bush fires or scent of acacia blossom."*

*Archaeologist Jonathan Kingdon wrote these words to describe his fascination with the people of the ancient past.*

## THE BIG PICTURE

Think about how much your life has changed in ten years. Then think about how much life in the United States has changed from 100 years ago. That was a time when horses far outnumbered cars and most people lived on farms. Now picture in your mind the land of the United States 1,000 years ago. At this time Native Americans lived from coast to coast.

A thousand years is a very long time. When compared to the whole history of the world, however, it is hardly longer than a blink of the eye. Scientists disagree about just how long people have been around. Many think humans have been around for over 40 times 1,000 years, or 40,000 years. Some scientists think that people may have walked on Earth as long as *2,000* times 1,000 years ago—that is, 2 *million* years ago!

## LIFE LONG AGO

When did human life begin, and what was life like for the world's early people? These are big questions for historians and archaeologists. Many different answers have been given over time.

### Discoveries in Africa

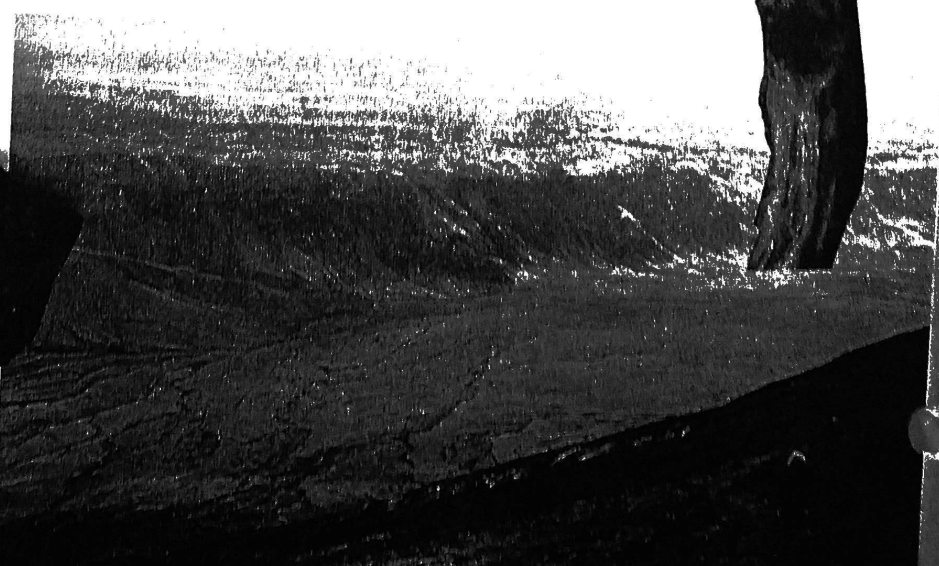
Scientists do not agree about where or when human life began. Some scientists today think that human life may have begun in Africa over 2 million years ago and then spread throughout the rest of the world. This conclusion is based on remains found by archaeologists in East Africa. Ancient remains uncovered there are the oldest of their kind ever found.

At one site in the country of Tanzania, a long canyon cuts deeply through the surrounding plains. In this canyon are dry beds of big prehistoric lakes. In those ancient lakebeds archaeologists have found remains that some think may be about 2 million years old.

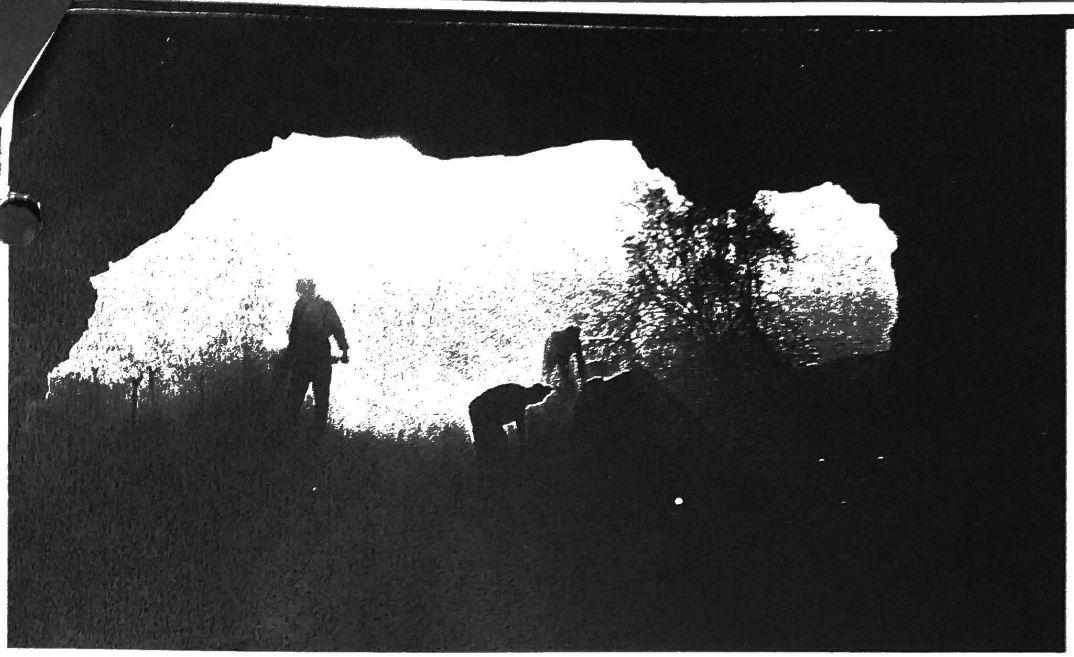
### Tools from Long Ago

Along with these remains, archaeologists have found what may have been the world's first tools. Viewed under a microscope, stones like the ones on this page reveal edges that were pounded to create a knife-like sharpness. They may not look like much to us, but the stones could cut through the hides of animals and chop through wood. These simple but useful tools mark the start of **technology** in culture. Technology is the use of skills and tools to meet practical needs. Stone tools were the most common technology until about 12,000 years ago. That period of time is called the **Old Stone Age**.

Remains of ancient animal bones found with the stone tools suggest that the early people hunted for survival. During the Old Stone Age, people learned another skill besides hunting and tool-making. This new skill was using fire, and it changed their lives. The technology of fire-building made it possible to cook food for the first time. It also meant people could move into colder climates. Warmth from fires helped people survive through the long winter months.



**Early people in Peru made this firestarter (above right). Many stone tools (above) have been found in the Great Rift Valley, Tanzania (right).**



Archaeologists probe the darkness of the Border Cave. History's treasures, in the form of artifacts, await.

## LIFE IN THE OLD STONE AGE

Before 40,000 years ago, stone-age technology gradually became more complex. Smaller and finer blades were crafted, for example. Some of the blades were tied to wooden handles to make small axes. From about 40,000 years ago, cultural changes came more rapidly. This also marked the time when people began to work more closely together and to develop cultures.

### Hunting and Gathering

What was it like to live on Earth about 40,000 years ago? Families that once lived in a cave in South Africa have left behind enough clues to give us an idea.

Border Cave is located in Zululand, the northeastern tip of South Africa. Look at the map on the following page to see where Border Cave is. Back then, much like now, the cave nestled in the side of a cliff. It overlooked a grassy river valley dotted with buffalo-thorn trees and other shrubs. Herds of eland (EE lund), a type of antelope, moved into the valley each year. There they ate grass and drank from the river. Border Cave was an excellent base for people who followed the herds and hunted them for survival.

Remains show that the people of Border Cave made their home as comfortable as possible. They lined its cool dirt floor with grass for bedding. They made campfires to cook on and to light the cave's darkness.

From the opening of the cave high on the cliff, the people of the Border Cave could keep watch over the animals' movement. These people probably traveled many miles to hunt the eland herds. Small, arrowhead-like blades suggest that these people may have used bows and arrows to kill animals for food.

The people of Border Cave were not just hunters, though. They knew a great deal about the plants around them. They knew which ones were tasty, useful as medicine, or filled with dangerous poisons. Ancient remains of seeds and leaves show that they gathered wild plums, oranges, and starchy plants for food. They also may have used seeds from nearby trees to help soothe coughs and upset stomachs. Since these people met their needs by hunting and by gathering plants, they are known as **hunter-gatherers**.

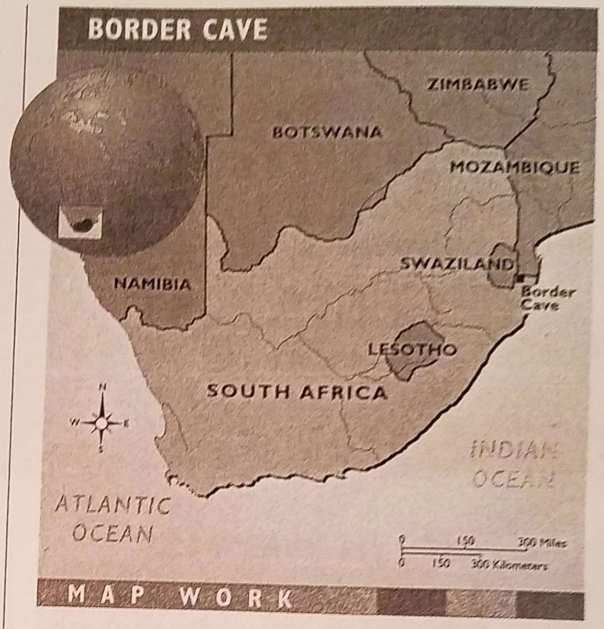
## A Changing Culture

At some point many thousands of years ago, a small baby was buried along with a seashell bead towards the back of the cave. This act reveals several important things about life among the people of Border Cave.

It suggests that the baby was deeply cared for. Otherwise people would not have bothered to bury it. It also suggests that the people believed the child would somehow live on after death, or it would not have mattered that the child be buried with the bead. Many archaeologists think that such thoughts about life and death marked the beginning of religious belief in the world.

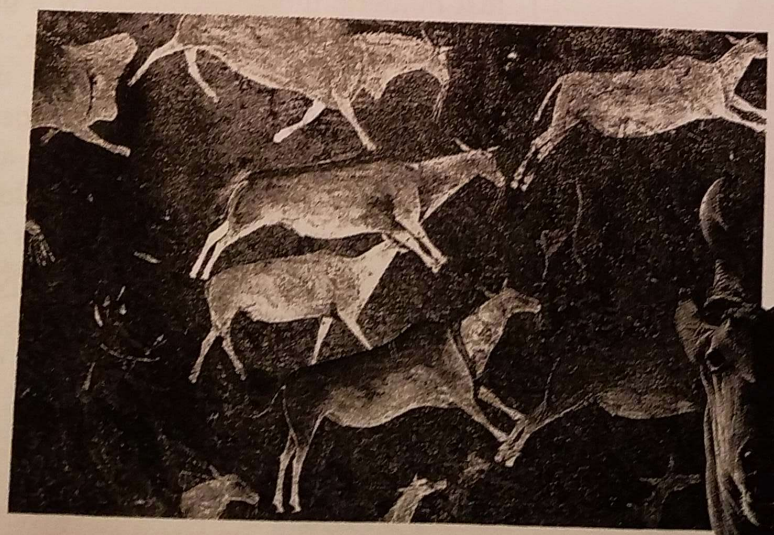
The seashell bead says other things about the everyday lives of the people of Border Cave. At times they must have traveled to the shores of the Indian Ocean, some 50 miles away. Additionally, the bead shows that these early people valued beauty. Why else would they take the time to make something otherwise "useless" out of the shell?

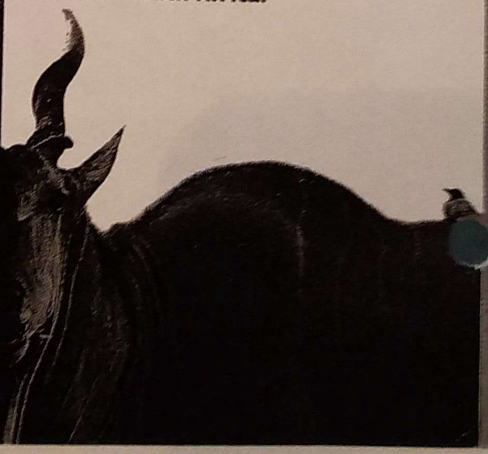
The earliest signs of art in human culture date back about 40,000 years. Amazing rock paintings in France and Spain date back to about 30,000 years ago. Many other breathtaking rock paintings and carvings dating back 10,000 years have been found on every continent inhabited by humans. The exact purpose of these pieces of artwork is not known. It is clear, however, that the makers of each had something they wanted to say. The ancient artists found a way to express themselves through their artwork.




Border Cave is an important archaeological site in South Africa.

1. What bodies of water lie on either side of Africa?
2. Which of them is Border Cave closer to?



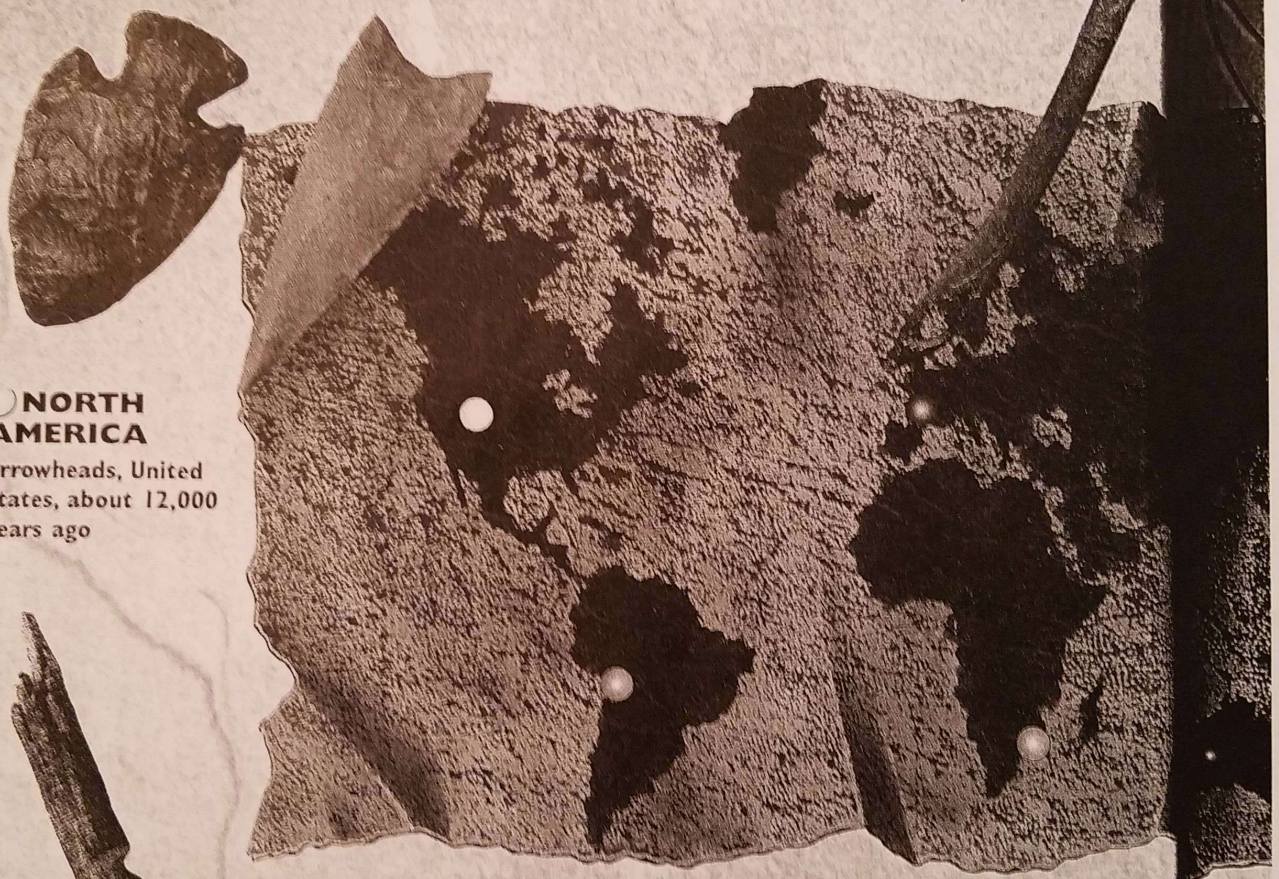


**Early hunters made these rock paintings (left) showing great herds of eland in South Africa.**

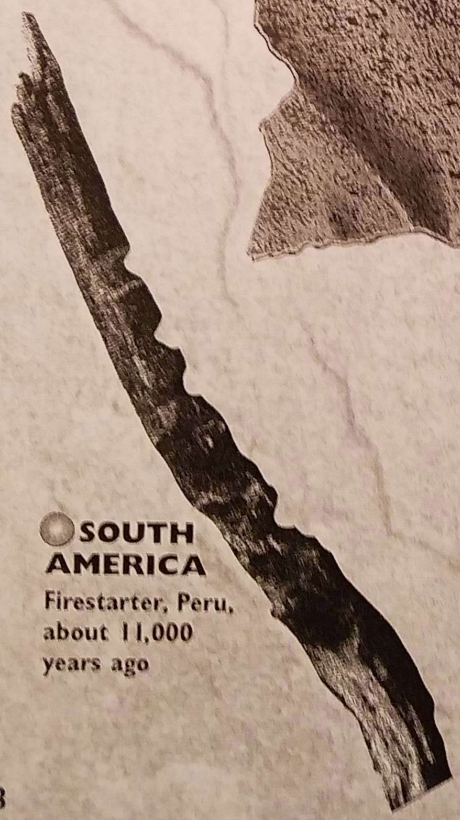
# Infographic

## Old Stone Age Technology Around the World

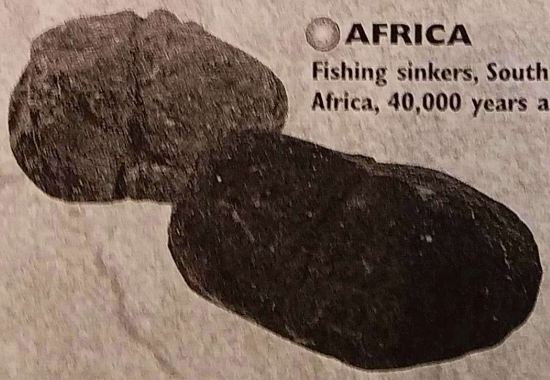
Imagine how difficult it would be for people to build things without the help of machines. As you read in Lesson 1, Stone Age people used tools they made by hand. Some of the things they created still survive today as artifacts. What kind of skills were needed to create these objects?



**NORTH AMERICA**
Arrowheads, United States, about 12,000 years ago

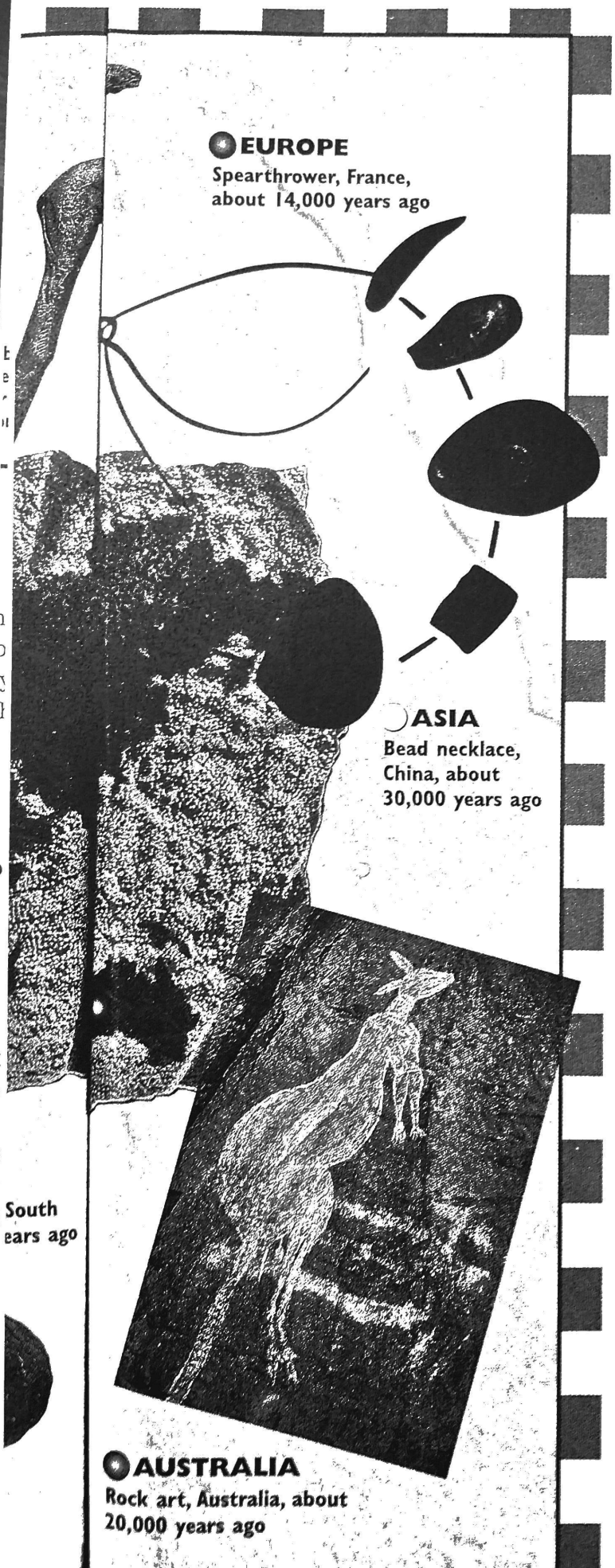


**SOUTH AMERICA**
Firestarter, Peru, about 11,000 years ago



**AFRICA**
Fishing sinkers, South Africa, 40,000 years ago

**A**
Rock
20,0




## WHY IT MATTERS

From about 40,000 years ago until the end of the Old Stone Age roughly 12,000 years ago, human beings spread throughout the world.

During the next 6,000 years, life would change rapidly. For the first time in the long history of the world some people would live in small cities. Their homes would not be caves, but apartment-like buildings packed side by side. In the next lesson you will read about the changes that made such developments possible.

## Reviewing Facts and Ideas

### SUM IT UP

- Early people survived by hunting animals and gathering plants.
- Technology began with the creation of tools out of stone.
- At the end of the Old Stone Age, art and religious beliefs were a part of human life.

### THINK ABOUT IT

1. How did the Old Stone Age get its name?
2. How did life on earth change during the Old Stone Age, beginning around 40,000 years ago?
3. **FOCUS** What kinds of technology did the people of Border Cave use in order to survive?
4. **THINKING SKILL** Based on what evidence can we make the *conclusion* that human life became more complex at the close of the Old Stone Age?
5. **WRITE** Write a paragraph that compares your life today with what it might have been like to live in Border Cave in the Old Stone Age.